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Limits of Progress

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Return-Path: <jkubala@EMORY.EDU>
Date: Fri, 1 Nov 1996 11:42:35 -0500 (EST)
From: Juliana Marie Kubal <jkubala@emory.edu>
X-Sender: jkubala@curly.cc.emory.edu
To: "Holly J. Nichols" <hnic7063@uriacc.uri.edu>
Subject: Re: Perspectives on Progress (fwd)

Hi Holly,

Thanks for your e-mail. About the phone number, I left a message on the women's studies answering machine (401) 874-5150. Of course, it's always possible I forgot to leave my number or something.

Our panel consists of Janet Jakobsen, University of Arizona, Sara Look, Charis Books and More, and myself, from Emory University. We would like an hour and fifteen minutes to an hour and a half, and we would want at least half of that time to be spent in discussion. I'm typing in the summary, so please excuse any typos, because I'm not good at editing e-mail.

Limits of Progress: The Endless Loop of the S/M Debates

The feminist anti-pornography movement that gained prominence in the late seventies spawned a reaction among lesbians and feminists who argued for the liberatory nature of traditionally "deviant" sexual practices, particularly s/m. These debates, which became known as the "sex wars," repeatedly reified into binary oppositions of sexual radical versus anti-violence, despite continual efforts to resist this oppositional framework for discussion. These oppositions still continue; in a 1996 article, Ann Cvetkovich notes, "Too often, lesbian subcultures that focus on healing from abuse and those that encourage sexual exploration have been constructed, and have constructed themselves, as mutually exclusive, repeating anew the schism between pleasure and danger, and ignoring the fact that one of the most interesting things about sex is that it so often refuses that distinction" ("Sexual Trauma/Queer Memory: Incest, Lesbianism, and Therapeutic Culture," in GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies, Vol. 2, No. 4, 351-377, 1996, 355). This oppositional structure produces arguments highly dependent on personal experience which (paradoxically) make the expression of diverse and complex experiences unlikely. The resultant debate is and has been a highly emotional and personal discussion of our bodies and our sexualities which nonetheless is unlikely to articulate our particular and complex bodies and emotions.

In this panel, we would like to explore the limits of this oppositional structure, including the way that repeated efforts to subvert the binary nature of this debate have been inducted into one side or the other. In particular, we would like to explore connections between our current erotic lives and past histories, focusing precisely on the connections between "healing from abuse" and "sexual exploration." For example, is it possible to talk about sexual abuse without falling into the trap of seeing oneself or others as either a neurotic victim who needs to get over it or an authentic victim in need of liberation. These two well-worn paths limit options for individuals who want to find alternative strategies for dealing with their pasts. In particular, when survivors of sexual abuse also champion sexual exploration, their adult desire are sometimes reduced to a simple effect of the abuse. This reduction makes it difficult for people to articulate the real, complex links between childhood and adult sexuality. We therefore envision this panel as an exploratory discussion in which we can raise these issues as they have come up in our lives and encourage others to discuss their own experiences and practices.

Thank you for your consideration,
Julie Kubala

404-377-2617

27 October 1996

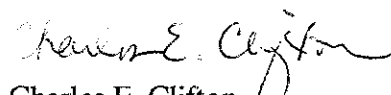
Holly J. Nichols
Women's Studies Program - Roosevelt Hall
University of Rhode Island
Kingston, RI 02881

Re: Third Annual Symposium on
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues

For the 1997 Symposium, "Perspectives on Progress," I submit for your consideration a paper entitled "The Politics of AfroHomosexuality and James Baldwin's *Another Country*." In this paper I develop an "AfroHomocentric" reading of Baldwin's novel. By AfroHomocentric, I mean a self-conscious recognition of the diversity which exists within African-America gay culture or as Kobena Mercer describes in his writings on marginalization, the acknowledgment of the specificity of the individual experience, as related to desire and sexuality. A second goal of this paper is to place Baldwin's novel within the context of contemporary debates involving Afrocentricity and AfroHomo identity politics. I question the problematic interpretations of Afrocentricity, where it is read as being only obtainable by black heterosexuals. In addition, I intend to re-visit theories on the fragmented-self and connections to black homosexual identity and desire. By no means is this paper meant to be an exhaustive study on sexual imagery in Baldwin's text or on black gay identity politics. It is constructed to connect themes in Baldwin's writings - love, desire, oppression of sexual identity and the absence of tolerance for individuality - with the of present day experiences of black gays in the age of AIDS. At your request I can submit a draft of my work in process.

I am currently a Ph. d. candidate, in the history department, at The University of Chicago. Under the guidance of George Chauncey, my dissertation project will focus on the black gay community in post-Stonewall Chicago. Thank you in advance for considering my submission. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



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773 -
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